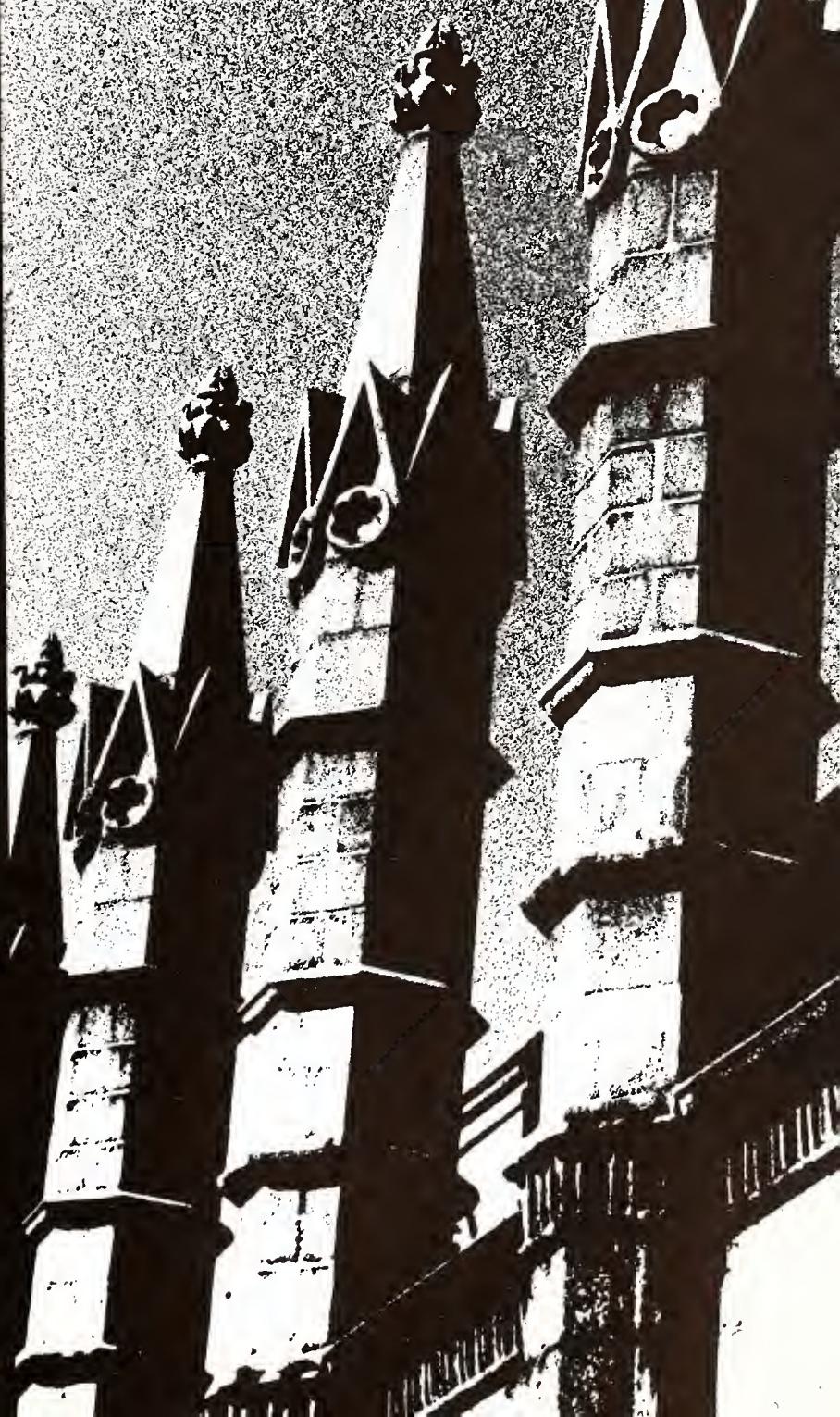


CORADDI





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CORADDI

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro

FALL-WINTER, 1972

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WHIRLPOOL

Rudy Martin

The shuttle slammed! into the frame.

Herman stood beside the loom staring at the pattern. Then the shuttle slammed! into the frame. A weaver in the next isle was blowing lint off his machine. The cotton floated around Herman, then settled behind him. Then it slammed! into the frame. The sweeper *ten minutes till smoke break* came by with his broom and gathered up the cotton.

"His name," asked the insurance adjuster.

"Herman Stultz," answered the foreman.

"Let me see. 'Cause of death' accident. How old was he?"

"bout 30."

"About 30?"

The foreman shuffled some papers in the file and answered, "33. 34 in March."

Then it slammed! into the frame *no lunch five minutes to smoke break* slammed! into the frame *she didn't fix me no lunch* shuttle slammed! into the frame *babies up all night* slammed! into the frame.

"Was he working on the machine?"

"Yea I think so. He'd been watching it all morning."

"Why," asked the man, "didn't he cut it off before he started to work on it?"

"Don't know. He never done nothing like this before. He was always a safe worker."

It slammed! into the frame *come on i need a cigarette* slammed! into the frame *jim's out of the booth i can go now* slammed! into the frame.

"Your turn, Herman" yelled Jim, trying to be heard above the machines.

"Thanks! Watch the isle for me will ya Jim."

He went into the booth and shut the door closing out some of the noise. He watched the shuttle retreat to the bobbins and then speed to the other side of the loom and slam against the frame. He took out a Pall Mall and lit it. The shuttle came back then sped away and slammed against the frame.

The fan in the small booth pulled the smoke out and gave him a little fresh air. The shuttle went down and slammed against the frame. He reached in the chest pocket of his overalls and took out his pocketbook. He held a picture of his children *emily, mary, jo, jack, sue* who were standing *randy, larry, lizanne*, in stairstep fashion *reggie and either sammy or debbie* beside his wife Gladys who was pregnant again.

"Why did he have to get down so close the cloth I wonder?"

"Well sometimes if you get real close you can see if the shuttle is lop-sided. Guess he got too close."

"Yea. Made quite a mess," answered the man as he signed the claim "I noticed a cigarette butt laying over there on that tool bench. Your men don't smoke outside that booth do they?"

"Oh no! no sir they don't! they know better."

"Well, watch and make sure."

it slammed into his frame He put the pocket book back in his pocket. Then he spit in his hand and ground out the cigarette. It slammed! either sammy or debbie into his frame.

"Eighteen years on the job and then a careless mistake kills him "

He opened the door and walked straight to the work bench and laid the butt down *slammed!* Then he took off his tool belt and laid it down.

"Thing I can't figure is why he didn't have his

tools. Man can't fix a shuttle without tools can he?"

"Nope. Sure can't. Let's get back to work "

He marched to the loom.

"Thanks for watching 'em Jim."

"Sure thing "

The shuttle went back and then sped toward him and slammed into the frame. Then it repeated the same motion again. And again. Herman bent over and laid his head on the frame



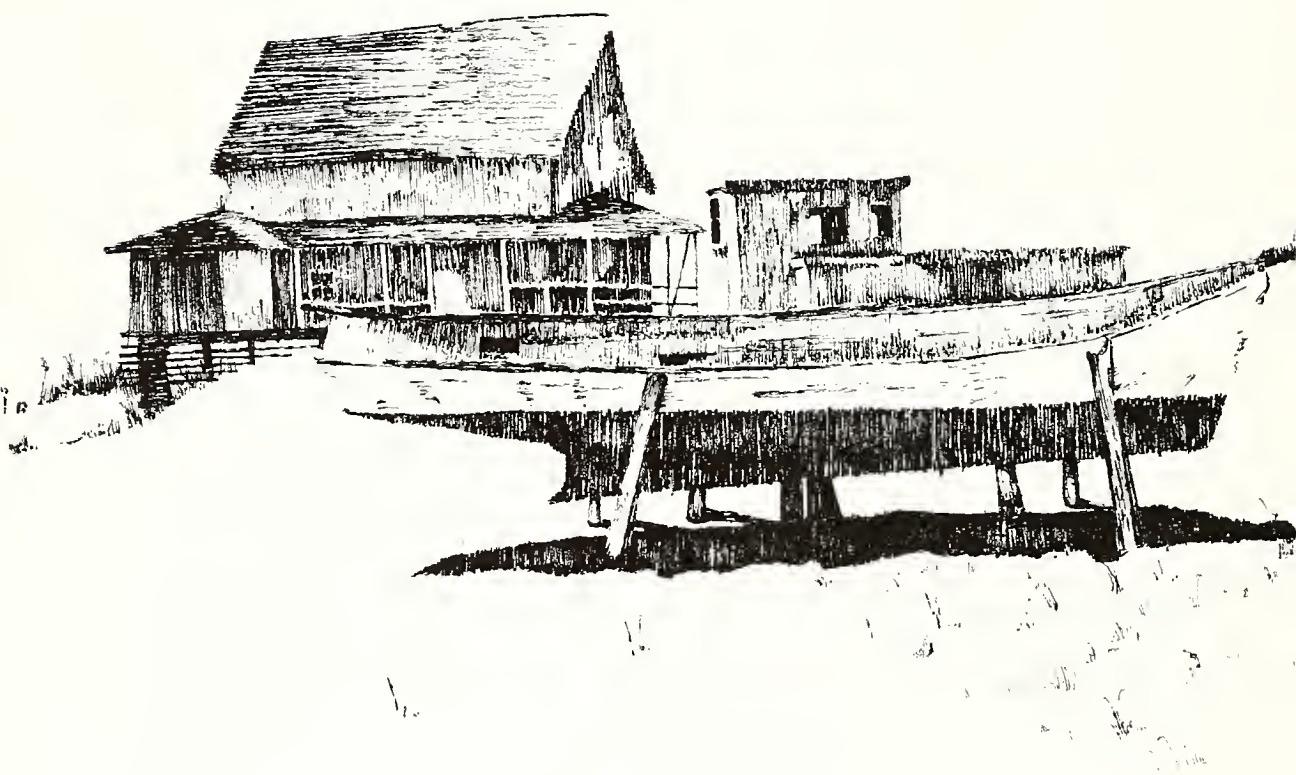
'midst gloom of winter rain
stand wood homes
in isolation, solitude:
bare woodland's greif.

distant clothed pines
stretch round coated hills,
holding heaven
for the few who dare inhabit the bleak
-alone
dwelling on countryside
where life holds trailed whispers
of a holy virgin
soon to be sold
to the whoredom of destruction
madrushing streams, in wave,
search desparately for escape
running
to the expansive tide of bitter fate

overcome by destiny,
strung by the thumbs,
clutched to the whipping post:-
night falls:
there is no escape.

an apostle of Paul
revived
who hung up
his revolutionary
tea kettle
and found
contentment
among the
sexual natives
who
writhed
under his
thumb--
but still
ganguin
had syphillus
and ruined
tahiti for
the hungry
to wave
who
ended up
building
his rise
resorts
and bell towers
with aboriginal
lanterns
hung
1 if by land
2 if by sea

and who after they
had a chance
would stand
in circles
dancing deranged
and manufacturing
trueing
beads
for the flower-shirted
semi- (demi-god)
colonials
to come
and be amazed
at out
but not under-
(stand it but who
would) over
on top od native
girls
starting the whole
thing over.
ganguin.



TO NANNY

October came
and went,
And I missed it.
On one day only
did I think to
look up at the
cobalt blue sky
The other days I
was busy
watching the
dead leaves (and those
dying in violence)
at my feet as I
stumbled along

Yes, there are people
starving in the mirror;
sterile glass;
To them each day is
eternal surviving it
infinity.
And yet I
managed to omit
thirty days from my
life not noticing them
as they passed
Nor being able to
recall their passing

I can hurt – I can
feel pain; I'm not
totally insensitive.
And it slowly shreds
my heart and soul to
watch people like
October's leaves, leaving
this earth in flashing
colors, some dying in
agonized still-living color
on the ground,

It slashes me razor-deep
to see some leaves
drop off, still green,
to slowly suicide (in
violently psychedelic
colors)
on the lonely ground.

You think you have
no morality,
no ethics; but do
You believe it?
I say you have
the highest
form of them -
Compassion;
Love,
Respect for the right
of humanness.
Your ethics are
love,
your morality
compassion and caring.
In their names, all your
actions are moral
and just;
Except your
Killing of your
Self.

October came and went,
and it passed me by –
save one leaf.

Charles C. Sullivan

OFF TO THE FUNNY FARM

Off to the funny farm
in a taxi
a flat rate
from the far reaches
of crazy Queens

my sister & I
with Mom in the middle
talk about all the places
we aren't going

"Now, this is just
to the doctor's,
isn't it?"
& we nod
lying like lovers
"Sure, Mom."

Past the airport
you sense we are
taking you for a ride
& I see than far away
look in your eye
turn inward focusing inside

your pupils roll back reality
& the show begins
you start to shake & sing
holy shit in some sad
& personal solo performance
as in the taxi's beat-up back seat
you give us a blow by blow account
of the Beatific Vision

"Jesus Christ,"
the driver says,

"I don't usually
get fares like this!"

THE BLACKBIRDS

tiny black specks
stuck in the cold eye
of winter's callous stare

rolled across the white field
like a flock of shivering snake-eyes
cast dice, loaded to lose
they've become bad bets
in debt to the balance
of nature

down & out blackbirds
their spring songs frozen
in their mute winter throats

bums by circumstance
pecking beaks
begging the skid-row snow
for a handout

this is the mean-time
waiting for the warm weather's
welfare check

they bide their time
by dying

Ralph Gerald Nelms

PATTERSONVILLE

The Pattersonville steeple is the highest edifice in Pattersonville. The homes of the village stand in rows alight with candles and melancholy faces. The roofs and belfry are shadowed against the sunset of an autumn day, while Pattersonville stands still.

The villagers gather like cold, moss-veiled tombstones outside the village tavern amid the still briskness and tarnished leaves blown across years of harvest seasons. The passing motorists can scarcely perceive the unripe wooden reason beyond fallen leaves raked to burn.

Their solemn vows spoken in the lyric disarray of the steeple bells in Pattersonville, the clarion call can still be heard carving memorials in their marble expressions as they make the evening procession to Potter's Field in the rain of autumn leaves and reflections, while Pattersonville stands still.

They walk into the garden where the tree of life has shed its leaves and all is mortal. The wind scatters a dirge across the silence and cold shadow and plants an autumnal wreath to remind them of the somewhere faraway other than home that circulates cold through the arteries like the sudden touch of marble.

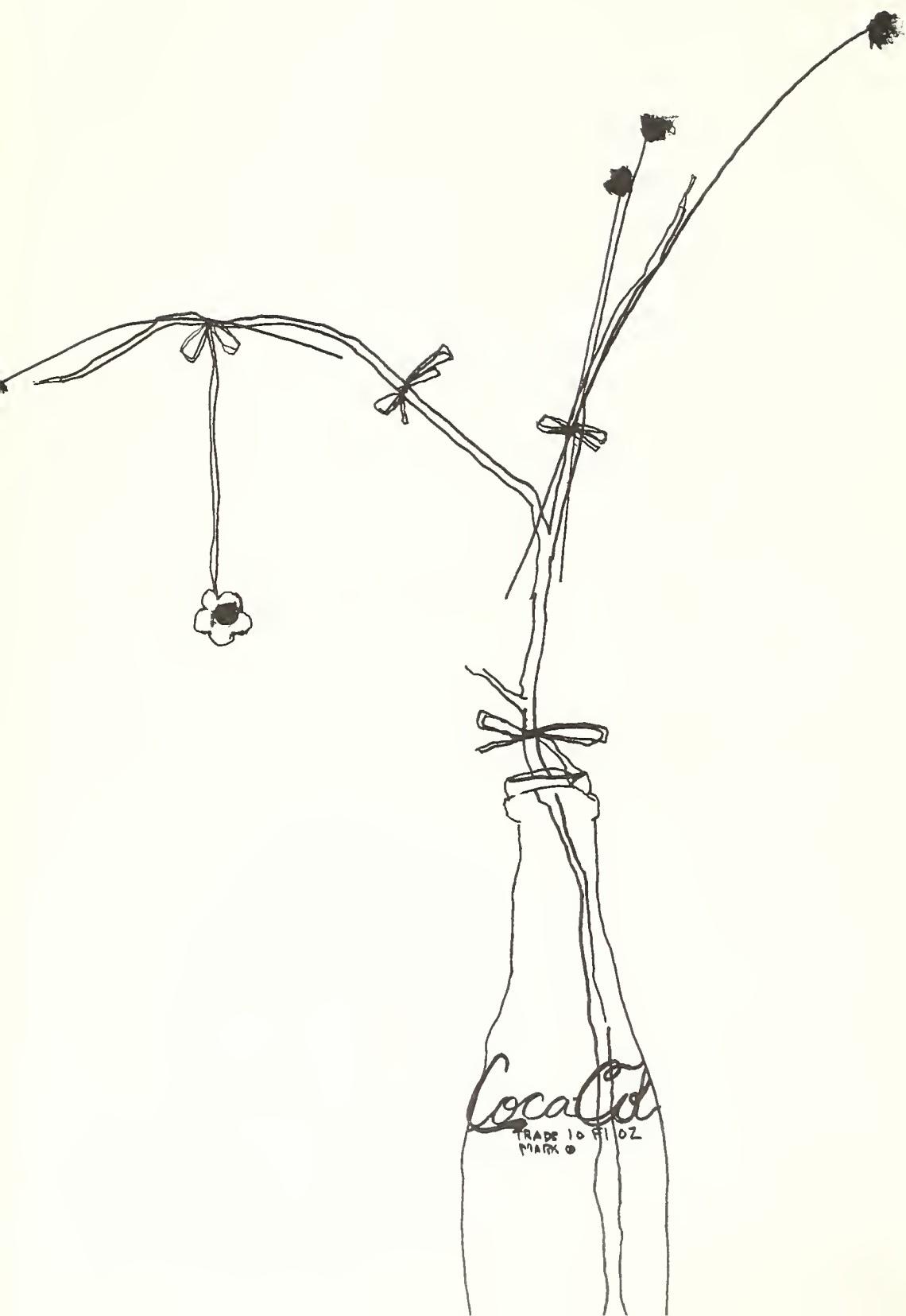
The population sign will be revised again in Pattersonville. The leaves have finally fallen and winter snows are on their way. The windows stand in rows lit with candles as dark as the grave. And Pattersonville stands still.

VOILA

you bombed paris alright
lying on a street
as starved
 & swollen
 as your guts.
the rats ate your poetry
the cold spat a deathtouch.

so you've come south for
a season;
 down Dante's Cone
riding your wooden horse
through paris sewers while
all that time you needed
this fix-
 behold Rimbaud!

drunk as a boat
afloat on the Styx



TELEMACHUS, TO HIMSELF

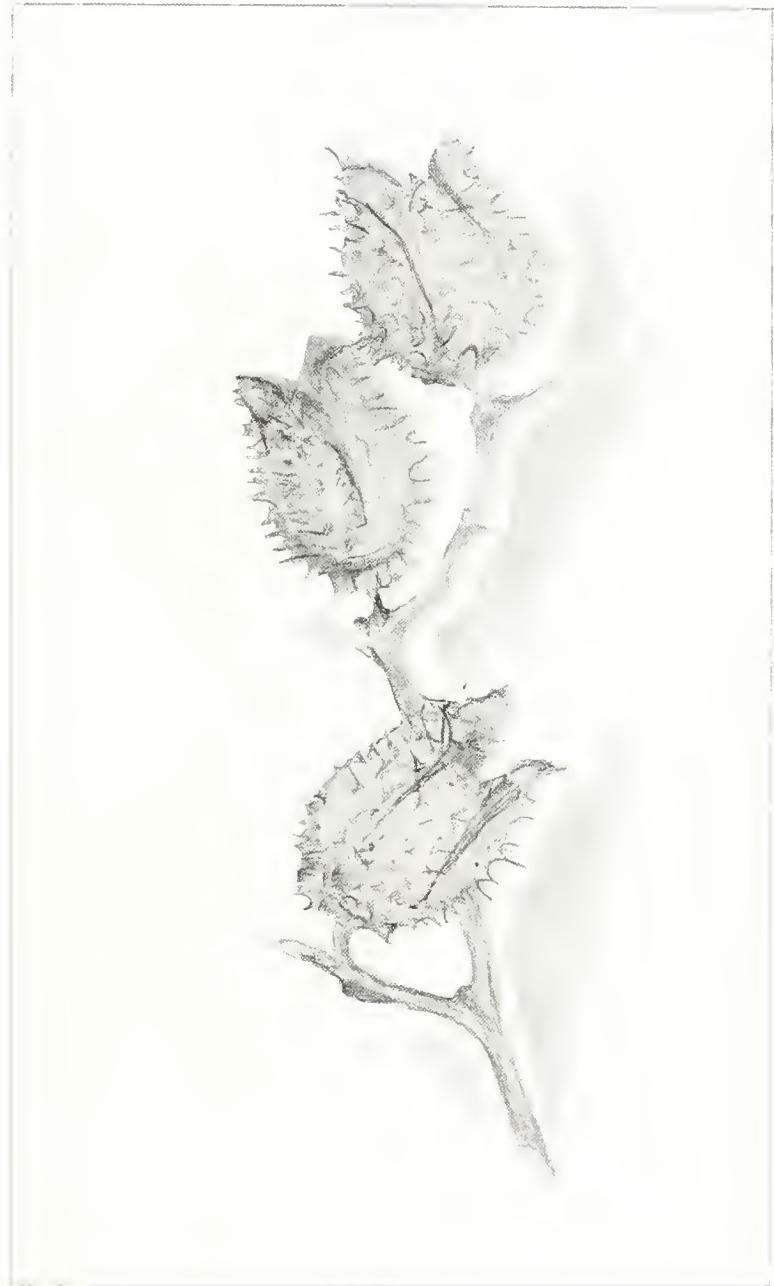
I had become almost like other men,
Looking on life with pain, without surprise,
And now my father has come home again
To daze me with his wisdom and his lies.
For twenty years my mother in her room
Has wept, and woven cloth she ripped at night;
But now HE comes to tear her from her loom,
Blind her with love, bewilder her with light.
And I will whisper so he cannot know
How his own household stammers till it find
The noisy wecome words that will not show
How rude is his returning, how unkind.
My country, my mother, our long wait is through--
Ulysses is back to tell us what to do.

people speak
 of changing trees in autumn
 that hang
with colors of fall's rustic rainbow
 and reincarnated silhouettes
painted to expansive evening blue.

 shadows of ghostriders: -on wind,
 streak before our eyes
 leaving senses in emotion-laden amazement
 with tales of lost years: spring.

acorns fall as sentimental raindrops
tear melancholy chips of vanity
gradually from the passing season

dancing gaily to a soft yet freezing bad,
 leaves glide,
harmonious and rhythmic, to voices
 of little children
singing among the green-fighting (green)
 to maintain
pure pastel quality.
 to rake those leaves,
 in placid palace
that have descended and accumulated:-
 the old oak died-



BIG
ANTIQUES
MARKET



THE PRISM OF GRANDMOTHER MILATE

Hugo Hildebrandt

There was a different smell in the kitchen. It was Sunday, an announced day for fried chicken, and Mrs. Milate was carefully frying legs and breasts in the copper skillet on the stove. Outside the house was four inches of snow. Old snow, though, melting very fast in the midst of a January thaw. It was really very ugly outside, bright sunlight on melting dirty snow. Twenty year-old Michael Milate sat at the kitchen table across from his grandmother. Grandmother Milate was trying to feed herself but she could not, and the fingers of her right hand were stuck in her bowl of vanilla ice cream.

He remembered very well, that was the whole problem. Because he could see and feel so clearly in his mind what she once was—what he once was—he was troubled. He could not understand the course of things, nor his own feelings, nor the old woman who was his grandmother, who sat quietly across the table from him. She no longer knew his name, or anyone else's. She was sick and very old, very shortly to die, very shortly to go to a nursing home she would leave only when she was dead. He felt frightened for her, but because she did not know or understand any more, that part of things did not bother him greatly. His father felt the same way. He had said many times to all of them that with Grandma the way she was everything would be easier. Grandmother Milate only smiled now, and talked with her ghosts. As she was dying, they were coming to life more forcibly than ever before. As a child he had listened to her stories, her talk of the old life, had tried imagine long-dead people and ancient places. But she wasn't just telling stories to him anymore, she was really living in them, in what he could only imagine, in times that were over before he was born. It was as if the past had already claimed her. And he could not understand any of it.

She was strapped loosely in her chair in a kind of harness. It allowed her to move her hands and arms freely, but it prevented her from standing up and possibly falling. A fall would certainly kill her, and his mother was always afraid that his

grandmother would somehow manage to untie the straps, try to stand and fall. But there was really little danger of that, since his grandmother could barely feed herself with her hands, and the harness was fastened behind her wheelchair. In fact, he usually tied it himself. She ate clumsily like a child, playing endless games with her food before trying to bring it to her mouth. It always ended up that someone had to feed her. Sunday was his appointed day, and he reached over to her taking the spoon from her hand, and began to feed her. The ice cream was starting to melt, but it looked good to him, and each time he lifted the spoon to his grandmother's mouth, he also ate some himself. She would crane her neck forward whenever the spoon approached her mouth, almost meeting it halfway like a small child who is being coaxed into eating something he really wants to eat, or a dog grasping for a treat.

SSS

He even remembered the smell of her old apartment—damp, musty, old, so different from his house. It was always very quiet at the apartment—just he and his grandmother, and usually very dark because there were few windows. But at night it was a very warm and secure place. He would sit in the front room watching television, staying up much later than he was used to at home, and his grandmother would bring milk and red MacIntosh apples sliced the way he liked them. During the day he would sit at the small kitchen table and play with his dozens of rubber and plastic soldiers, cowboys, cavalrymen, and Indians. He would erect huge forts out of Kleenex boxes and small pieces of wood and enact fierce and bloody battles, the Indians always winning. While he played his grandmother would cook or sew, but when she sensed his interest fading, and sometimes when she did not, she would sit down across from him and begin to tell him stories. She would continue for hours, if he let her, but usually he excused himself

to go to the bathroom, or to go watch TV, or to tell her that he was hungry. He listened mostly out of politeness and respect, but sometimes he would creep to the edge of the chair, prop his head up with his elbows, and dream along with her, as she told of her cousin who played shortstop for the Yankees or the girl who once lived next door to her but was murdered in a field on her way to church. They were strange stories, different than anything he was forced to read about at school, and often they were very sad. In his grandmother's stories children died of measles and TB, men worked for a dollar a day, people were poor and stayed poor. He was often frightened at what he thought the world was like then, and he felt warm and glad inside when he could go home and see the new car in the driveway and could go out and play baseball with his friends. He felt those times were very sad and mysterious, a dark kind of time that he could not really understand, that there was a real danger in living then. But always he would feel himself being drawn into her shadowy world as she talked, and his imagination would create colors and shapes and places to fit the people and things she talked about. He would find himself in a world that existed only in his mind, in his imagination, like a dream or something he would read in a book. Sometimes she would hurry into her tiny bedroom and return with old, yellowing pictures of people and houses, the kinds of pictures that portrayed the world back then as he really imagined it to be: gray, brown, without definite color, nothing in clear focus.

Because he had listened to her he sometimes could understand pieces of her conversation now. She never raved or screamed, but her thoughts existed only for seconds before changing or dying; and sometimes he would try to make her remember, but could not. She was in a world with people he knew about, but did not know. He knew that "Will" was her brother, that "Oregon Street" was, the place where she was born, that "The Cathedral" was where she went to grammar school; but she was not telling stories any more, but living in them, and there were never any explanations because they were actually taking place. Many times now when he sat with her in the kitchen he would try to make her remember the times when he was young. But she could not, and he was forced to remember alone.

\$ \$ \$

It was Thursday, not much snow left, what was left was dirtier than ever. Michael could hear his father talking as he closed the door to the garage

and walked into the kitchen. His grandmother was sitting passively in her chair, almost motionless, only her right hand moved as it listlessly played with the buttons on her housecoat. When Mr. Milate saw his son come in he put down his coffee and quickly stood up, looking across the room to his wife.

"Do you have all her things together, Helen?"

"Yes, they're already in the car."

"Well, get her coat then. We have to get going."

Mrs. Milate shut off the cold water faucet above the sink and walked briskly out of the room. "Have dinner ready when we get back," her husband called after her. Then he turned to his son and motioned to him that it was time to move his grandmother.

Together they went over to the chair. Mr. Milate began to unfasten the harness while Michael just stood over his grandmother, holding her hand. His grandmother's face was nervous, contorted, and her eyes began to constantly revolve around the room, shifting focus and direction. Each man took one of her arms and gently but forcefully, as they were accustomed to doing, stood the old woman up. Mrs. Milate, acting on cue, brought over the heavy red coat and struggled to get it on Grandmother Milate.

It took five minutes for Michael and his father to walk her out to the car. She tripped once on the garage steps, and almost fell. Mrs. Milate hurriedly opened the front door of the station wagon, and Michael carefully lifted the dead weight of his grandmother and sat her down on the seat. Mr. Milate slowly backed the car out of the driveway and headed for the nursing home. The car windows were filthy, and there was a strong winter glare from the dying sun and dirty streets. Michael's father spoke little except to comment on the cold front that was due to move into Cleveland that night. Michael sat in the back seat and watched his grandmother's white head, a tiny mass above the large red collar of her coat. Her head seldom moved, stayed solid, and she appeared to take no notice of anything. Inside he wanted her to scream

\$ \$ \$

When she was gone, she was also apparently forgotten. It was as if she were already dead. Outwardly, no one grieved for her; and while she lived she was really dead. Her name was seldom mentioned, she had simply vanished. She was visited often enough, but the half hour spent with her twice a week or so had a separate existence of its own and was never related to any other activity. But then, as everyone had said, she did not really know if you were there or not. Strangely the

longer she was gone, the more thoughts of her began to possess and torture him. He could not understand the process of it all, of her dying, of her becoming a child again before she died, of any reason or purpose of her continued existence. And the memories constantly gnawed at him. He could not imagine himself being remembered the way she was, that there could be such an ultimate and final exclusion of all she once was. It scared him to think of her, to imagine her as once young, as young once as he, and younger. She had once been a particle in her mother's womb, a pretty dark-haired girl, a bride, a lover, the cause once of a young man riding underneath a train from Cincinnati to Cleveland. But she was old when he was born, grew older and finally senile as he grew up. He could not imagine her as anything but old. He considered his life full, he felt he treasured a million memories, that life was everything and would go on forever, that he would never die, that he still hungered to grow older, that he was so confident of life he sometimes dreamed of romantic and heroic death. He had never known death close-up, and he could never imagine it as inevitable, as being so close—as it was for her—that one could almost reach out and touch it. Then her stories, the visions and dreams of the old world she had given him, would come back—as mysterious as sand and real as ever. He thought often of the times she described to him, still pictured the strange places and names, and even stranger happenings. They held a meaning for him, as did she, but he could not discover what or where they were.

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It was three days past Easter Sunday, and he was drinking beer in a bar with his older brother, who had flown in from New York for the holiday with his wife. It was his first visit home for his brother in nearly a year.

"Do you still see her much, Mike?"

"A couple of times at least, every time I'm home from school." He lifted the glass to his mouth. "It's rather depressing."

"You wouldn't get me within a hundred feet of that place, if I could help it. You're nuts to go there. Hell, she doesn't even know us anymore. Not even you."

"But I want to go . . . I think I should go."

"You don't owe her anything, Mike. The state should be taking care of her. I don't like the idea of Dad shelling out all that money every month to those greedy bastards at the nursing home. They

just pump her with drugs and clean up after her, and try to keep her alive as long as they can. Every extra day means another dollar in their pocket. It was better in the old days when people died quicker." He stopped for a few moments and casually ordered another beer. "When an animal gets too old to take care of itself, it dies. They don't hang around and expect their young to take care of them. Things couldn't work out that way."

"You're talking shit, Bob."

"Hardly. Think about it. I know I'm right." Mike looked at him somewhat unbelievably, but with no apparent hostility. With his mouth formed in a half smile he looked away from his brother and toward the bowling machine across the room.

"I take it you're not overly fond of old people."

"Of course not." His brother paused to sip his beer. "Hold on, Mike. I love Grandma. She is my grandmother. But in general old people make me sick. They're gross. I hope I die when I'm fifty goddamnit. There is no sense in being old. Absolutely none." Mike began to squirm in his seat.

"I don't know what it is yet, but I think there is some sense to it. There has to be." Mike's voice was slow and serious. His brother began to frown.

"There isn't, Mike. There just isn't. Face up to it. When we get old nature is just telling us it's time to call it quits. I'm not trying to rile you, Mike. I know how close you two always were. I'm just telling you how I feel." His tone grew soft, almost consoling. "I don't envy any of us a bit." He began to move his glass in small circles on the table. "Mike, Grandma is really almost a vegetable, isn't she?"

"Maybe."

"Well, what good can there possibly be in that? He stared at his brother, but got no real reaction. "Hell, enough of this. What do you think of the Indians this year?"

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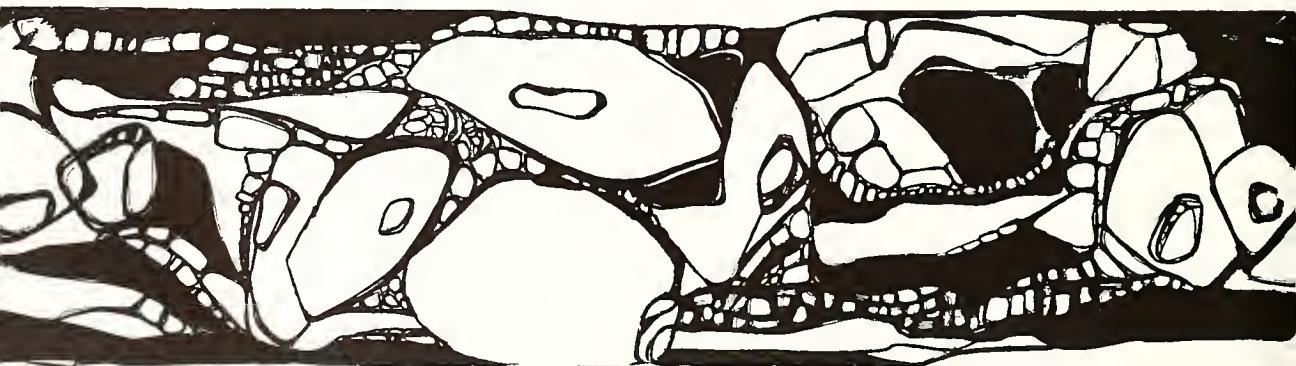
The old Irish ghetto on Cleveland's near West Side was no longer Irish, except for a few collections of people his grandmother's age. On a cool night early in June he drove the ten city miles that separated his neighborhood from hers and parked his car in a supermarket lot at the corner of the street on which she was born. The supermarket was like many near his home but seemed odd and out of place surrounded by old houses and short narrow brick streets. He got out of his car and began to walk up the street. It was very dark, and he was scared. Two children ran past him yelling to

one another in Spanish. It was not easy finding his grandmother's old house in the dark. Often enough he had been driven by it and had it pointed out to him, but he had lost his orientation walking the street in the dark. But then he was in front of it. There were lights in all the first floor windows, but the upstairs was dark, and the high, arched gables slightly visible in the night made the house seem mysterious, foreign, years away from him. He looked at the house for several minutes, then continued to the north, toward Detroit Avenue. There was a strange feeling inside him. He had come to the old places to look for the ghosts, but knowing there would be none. He was struggling to find a feeling for those things gone, those things dead in the past, those things dying with his grandmother but refusing to die within him. It was a strange walk, down narrow streets that had seen three generations. These places were not special, not holy, but still places locked in memory and feeling, and therefore strangely eternal. There were none of the old faces there in the dark, but he could feel them in the houses, walking the streets, in the stores, in the bars, in the spirits of children playing in the bushes around the old houses. A feeling of lightness came over him, as he walked he listened to the sound his feet made on the pavement and to the whistling of the trees in the dark. If there was such a thing as a past, he now knew of it, could feel it. He had a knowledge of what he had come from, of the kind of life that existed and ceased to exist before him, of the people and blood that made him. As a child he had been taught, now as a man the memories of the memories gave him a new sense of life, and a feeling about life that made him old.

\$\$\$

It was nearly seven thirty, a warm, beautiful August evening. He came into her room and saw her laying in the hospital bed with white sheets tucked carefully around her, exposing only her white and withered head. The room was painted yellow, very bright, and with the fading sunlight stretching itself on the bed through the window, it was beautiful and warm. On her nightstand was a vase of carnations. He walked over to the window and looked down at the children playing baseball in the parking lot behind the houses. Then he looked directly at his grandmother, laying motionless, but almost smiling at him. He started to cry inside himself. He could see her watching him, and still the half smile, very delicate. He went over to her, put his cheek against her mouth, and she kissed him. Her mouth jumped at him almost desperately although no other part of her body moved. The light was beautiful on her face. He continued to look at her but did not speak. Then he left, walked out her door, down the steps, through the lobby past the pretty girl at the desk and the two old men in wheelchairs by the door, and out into the parking lot. He leaned against the car, still crying inside himself. He was a boy with curly hair and freckles. And he was more. They were ancient and mortal prisms, they had their own positive brilliance but they could show you what you came out of and where you were going. They were good even when they were worn, and cut, and hopeless, because through them everyone could see what he really was. She had seen both sides for him all along. Knowing about death, she had told him about life. They are connectors, these people in white sheets and harnesses.

He stepped into his car, started the engine, and pulled out of the parking lot, past the children playing baseball. Then he disappeared into the rapidly moving traffic.



THE HOTEL

The hotel stands alone, cold,
Empty and hollow on the mountain top.
Winter's wind mourns through a forest
Of gray tree tops, a chorus of baritones
Dedicating evening to speeding clouds
And sudden furious blasts of snow flakes.

The hotel, a huge white monster
Carved from the forest itself,
Stands solid, half submerged in snows
Piled upon unthawed snows.
Whiteness, purity, wilderness and hotel,
Blended, buried, frozen in their oneness.

The hotel, halls filled with frozen echos
Of summer feet, moans and creaks
With too many blizzards and too many
Days of violent mountain top wind--
Aging, decaying, waiting to be rocked
Internally by carnivals of summer feet.



Ralph Gerald Nelms

SOFT AND SILENT RAINS

The rain that once fell soft and silent
over timeless fields of flowers and rye,
that yielded to the sun its bed of sky,
now a constant torrent of threats and
tiding terror, seeming solid but slush,
bogging down the paths to Understanding,
wearing away the old bridges to Love,
is defeated by tar roofs of hypocrisy
and glass domes of secret bigotry and
guarded against by concrete veils and
asphalt streets of apathy; still through
cracks in the sidewalks of sterility,
Buttercups and Dandelions survive; and
through cracks in awnings of bureaccuracy,
tears of soft and silent rains are cried.

MATCH PACK

“Sick and Tired of Your Job?
Our Coupon Can Change Your Life”
You open the cover
Inside, rowed neatly in threes,
Twenty faces: red heads,
Black heads, blue heads,
White heads--all cold heads.
Close the cover,
You can’t forget them;
Strike one,
They burn to death.

THE DOCTOR

There are few homosexual writers
And you want to write.
Friends can’t satisfy
A transexual craving for security.
You need more than my money and operation.

Youthful games contradict mature desire,
Lose a handsome beard,
Make the opposite of yourself.
The inverted slide
Through the percent of unsatisfied humans.

A POEM FOR THE PATIENT

Moving past me, small, unbeautiful,
The plain face buried under hardened layers
Of alternating cold cream/powder/rouge,
The wild eyes peering through mascaraed lashes,
The long red hair, not right, not close to right
But fiercely brushed and standing threateningly
In humming insolence out from your head-
“My hair,” you whispered to me, moving lips
Drawn stiff, lipsticked into paralysis,
“It talks to me, it tells me, oh, it tells me-”
And almost I believe you now, remembering
The fiery circle never swaying with you
But blowing in a solitary wind.
All I could say to you was, “Cut it then,”
Watching the shadows in my eyes dark corner
Spread hopelessly into the endless hall.

Passing your room and looking through the glass,
There never was a time I did not fear
To see you watching in the breakproof mirror
The arced and rhythmic sweeping of your arms
That brushed the noisy reddened waves around you
In fruitless, terrified propitiation
A woman with a bear, a dog, a fox
To be stroked into an uneasy sleep.



Ellen Lane

THE LADIES IN WAITING

The walls in the asylum are not high.
They are a gentle barrier, red brick,
Five, six feet tall - so shallow that the sky
Pours in and sunlight makes the women sick
With memories that they are not sure about,
That knowing what they are they cannot trust.
It took them years but they have learned to doubt
Their slightest breath that may be lifting dust
From bodies turned to corpses, unaware
Of having been moved on to some new place
In their extremity they do not care
Death wears no new or terrifying face
They have not seen.

The south wall has no gate,
But on the southern wall they lean, they wait.

SOMEBODY'S GONNA GIT RICH SOME DAY

Rudy Martin

Henry was squatting beside the stream shifting water back and forth in an old scarred pie pan. He picked up a few gravel and studied them for a yellow glitter. Seeing none, he threw them into the stream and started the ritual again. He didn't have on a hat; this made it hard on him when he was panning because sometimes the sun would get in his eyes and he would think he had seen some gold. The constant suspense made him nervous and nervousness made him sweat. The drops would flow off his black forehead and drop on his cheeks. He would wipe the sweat with the sleeve of his burlap shirt, having long before established the wiping as a habit. Dip in the pan, swirl it, examine a few rocks, throw them into the stream, wipe his forehead, then dip in his pan again.

He had bought his two acres from a white man named Abedia Jones for seventy-five dollars. It was February then and the stream which bisected the land had been freezing cold. It flowed from Beebow Mountain some eleven miles away to the east. Now as Spring was coming to North Carolina, the stream flowed a little faster, but it wasn't bringing down any new gravel for him to pan. He wondered why the mountain didn't release its wealth into the stream now so he wouldn't have to wait so long — he prayed but no gold appeared. Still, he kept his faith in the stream and the mountain and God, and everyday he would do the same thing and nothing else: pan for gold.

Henry's wife, Harriet, didn't have the same faith in panning that he had. She believed there was no gold in North Carolina and there wasn't any use in wasting all your life looking for it. She and Henry had been raised on the Plantation and there they had learned that real wealth lay in the soil and what you could raise from it. Finding gold would be luck or an accident, and since they were black, she knew they wouldn't ever have that good fortune. Wealth, she had learned, was nothing if it was based on something that didn't exist. Every chance she had, she would fuss at Henry, telling him that the white man had fooled him; he wouldn't listen though.

Today, for the first time in a week, Harriet had gone to the stream and stood behind her husband. She looked at the sweat-stained shirt and heard his heavy breathing.

"Henry Putnam you going to kill yourself and you know it. There ain't no gold here."

Henry stopped panning and laid the tin pan down on the bank. He stood up, wiping his forehead and looked at the mountain.

"Grandpa told my Pa, and my Pa told me. They says there's gold in Carolina and I believes them."

"Spring's coming Henry and we've got to plant some crops or we'll have nothing to eat. You know it, you just won't admit it."

"Well, one of these days that mountain's going to let loose a whole bunch of gold and I'm going to be here to scoop it up. I.. be rich then — just a matter of time, Harriet.

Harriet didn't like idle dreaming. As a girl in Alabama, her father had always told her that some day she would be free; 'it was just a matter of time.' But it was the same thing her grandfather had told her father. Just keep dreaming and hoping we'll be free someday. Someday. Harriet had waited for thirty years to be free, to go out and work for herself, and clean her own house and to be able to kiss her husband when he came in from his field and then cook his supper. Now that she was free she wanted those things. But Henry was still hoping for something more.

"Yea, one of these days," she mimicked him. "Instead of wasting all your life here for the gold to come down, why don't you go up there and dig it out!"

She turned and stalked back to the small cabin.

"Cause the mountain don't belong to me" he mumbled to himself. Then he squatted down again and went back to his work.

Harriet set the plate of grits down on the

oilcloth in front of her husband. He had his head propped on his hands, staring out the window at the sun coming up over the mountain.

"Eat ya food, Henry and stop staring out that window."

"I ain't too hungry. Besides I got something on my mind. Remember what you said the other day about the mountain? I bet you Abedia would sell us a piece of old Beebow, don't you?"

She stopped making the coffee and sat down across the table from him.

"Henry, what you want with another piece of land for? We got us a piece of land here and about fifty dollars left over from what Master Penhook gave us. We ain't going to spend that money on no more land because we got plenty of good soil out there and if you'd just work it, we wouldn't have to worry about nothing. The earth'll give us food. If you got a brain in that skull of yours you'll ride that mule into town and buy us some seeds so we can plant some food. Just get it into you head that you ain't going to be no richer than you already are."

Henry kept his eyes on the mountain and picked up his spoon and began to eat.

"You ain't listening. You don't never listen. You just want to be an uppity nigger and strut around all the time and smile at the women! You worked in Master Penhook's house to long. You got used to seeing all those pretty things. Don't you realize that those wasn't Penhook's things. He didn't make them. We did. He didn't do no work, we did the work and he got all the money. But no, you can't see that. Sometimes I think you're still just a dumb nigger butler! Sometimes that's all I think you'll ever be!"

"I think I'll ride into town today."

He laid down his spoon.

"What for? You going to Stadler's to buy some seeds or are you going down to see Jones?"

"Just shut up and tell me where the money is."

Harriet clamped her lips together and refused to speak. Henry got up and started searching for the money. He looked through the cabinets and the flour and sugar barrels, then went to the bed and looked under the mattress.

"Where is it woman?" His voice had an impatient irritated tone.

"Promise you going to buy seeds?"

"I ain't promising nothing, now give me the money!"

"If you ain't going to buy seeds, what you going to do with it?"

"Ain't none of your business. Now give it to me!" He started toward her.

"Alright, alright. But if you come home with another land deed, I'm leaving!"

She reached into the front of her dress and brought out the roll of money. Henry grabbed it out of her hands and left the house for town.

Abedia was laying on his hotel bed drinking whiskey. Drinking was about all he did now that he had sold his land to Henry Penhook. He knew when he had sold it there was no gold there and never would be. But he was tired of working it. It was an endless cycle in farming; he had done it since he was small and he promised himself he wouldn't do it any more — unless he really had to and then only if there was relly something in it beside dried corn and a sore back.

He counted his money: twenty-seven dollars; the sum of his worth in this life and the liquor made him seem worth even less. He took another drink; it burned his throat. But it also burned more: his mind, burning in the realization that he had done it to himself had sold his land to a nigger and turned the town against him, leaving himself with nothing and no future to earn anything.

Abedia was startled by a knocking at the door.

"Who is it?"

"Me, Mister Jones. Henry Penhook."

He got up and opened the door letting the black man enter. Then he went back to his bed

"What can I do for you, Mister Penhook?"

"I want to talk some business with you, sir. I ain't got nothing from that land yet so I want to buy a piece of that mountain."

"You ain't got nothing yet?"

"No sir — But that's not your fault. It's the mountain's. Just a little stubborn I guess. You want to sell me a piece of it sir?"

Jones took another drink.

"Don't own that mountain."

"Don't own it? Mean you can't sell me none of it?"

"That's right. I don't own that mountain. Somebody else does. Somebody else owns everything. Mister Penhook. That's the story of our lives. Somebody else owns it."

Henry sat down on the edge of the bed

"What do I do now?"

"Get drunk," said Jones.

Abedia poured some whiskey into a glass and Henry drank it. The townsfolk were beginning to crowd into the streets amidst the barking of a little boy's puppies. The clock in the room ticked in a dull iambic, chiming at the hours.

"Yep. All I got now is my spirits," said Abedia pointing toward the bottle, "and I'll give you that. All I got."

"Sure would like to have that mountain, Mister Jones. Harriet thinks I'm crazy. She says quit panning and I keep telling her I'm going to find gold and build her a pretty house and buy her some pretty clothes. She won't listen, Mister Jones. She just pouts, and struts around, and yells at me, and tells me to plant crops."

"That's the way we all are. Somebody else owns it. Somebody else. All we can do is take what they throw of. Use it. That's all we can do. Take that mountain now — sitting up there all smug and pretty — thinks it's something don't it?" He chuckled and nudged Henry. "Look what it's throwing away though. Water. Sends a good stream right through your land. Probably good farming out there. Raise some good food."

"I seen people planting all my life, don't want to do it no more."

Abedia stuck his hand in his pocket and felt his money. He thought about Henry's land and what he could with it. Working for a black man wouldn't be that bad; the townsfolk hated him anyway so it wouldn't hurt his reputation.

"What if I helped you plant it — for just small pay?" You could go on panning and I'd raise you some food. Thing that'd work?"

Henry rolled his head and looked at Abedia.

"How would I pay you?"

"You could just give me some food or gold."

"And if there ain't no gold?"

"We'll work out something."

"Guess it might work. You planting and me panning." Alright then we'll try it Mister Jones.

Abedia rolled off the bed and stood up unsteadily.

"Consider it done then Mister Penhook. Let's drink to it."

Harriet had been sitting at the window all day, watching the western slope for her husband. The sun was going down and night was settling in with all its sounds. She was tired and slowly she was lulled into sleep by the monotone chirping of the crickets — lulled into sleep with the relentless dream, the recollection of the real life nightmare. She could see herself standing in front of the slave quarters with her baby bundled in a blanket and a white man standing before her smiling reaching out for another of her children, she crying no! and running, him chasing always chasing and then catching her and taking her babies. Then she would run to her husband who was always standing beside a white man, she yelling "Henry! Henry! They

done took my baby again, Henry!" But he stood there saying nothing and the white man smiling and she yelling "Henry! Henry!"

Harriet was startled awake by her own screams. The sun was up and she looked out the window. She wiped her eyes to make sure she wasn't still dreaming for there in their yard stood Henry with a white man — Abedia Jones. Henry was watching Jones plowing with the mule. Harriet got up and walked out of the cabin to Henry.

"What you doing, Henry. What's he doing here?"

"We got us an agreement. He farms and I pan for gold. That ought to make you happy, Harriet."

"How you going to pay him? How Henry?"

"With the gold. Now leave us be!"

"But what if there ain't no gold. What then?"

"I'll give him some of the crops. But there's going to be gold, I'm sure of it Harriet."

Harriet looked at the white man plowing their land. Abedia looked over at her and smiled. That have her a queer feeling, a chilly feeling up her spine — him on their land plowing their crops, taking their food

"No! Henry, No! This is our land and our food. Get rid of him Henry."

Abedia was still smiling

"You just hush up woman and go back to the house. Me and Mister Jones have got it all figured out. He farms and I pan. Now get!"

Harriet looked at her husband, and again at Abedia who was still smiling then turned hitching up her dress and walked back into the cabin slamming the door behind her.

"I better get on to my work. You need any help just yell, Mister Jones."

Abedia snapped the guide lines and yelled for the mule to get going. Henry picked up his pan and left. The stream was rising now coming slowly up the banks: the winter snow on the mountain was melting.

DAWN CHAPPELL

